



## SCYL Teens Explore Dreams, Visions, and Ghost Stories at Almont Spring Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

**T**wenty-two teens sat in a circle around a single candle as I opened the retreat late Friday evening with the shadowy, “All my ghost stories are true.” Thus began the 2019 Almont Memorial Day Weekend Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Teen Retreat called Dreams, Visions, and Ghost Stories. Over the long holiday weekend we uncovered wonderful tales of dreams and visions from the Bible and personal experience. We also listened to a real spooky ghost story each evening before slipping off to sleep.

Rev. Renée Machiniak led the first two sessions on Joseph’s dreams and visions. She began by asking a few of the teens to share a recent or significant dream. Then, she talked about Joseph and the dreams he shared with his brothers. Renée helped the group understand the difference between dreams and visions by explaining,

“Visions are clear, direct, and

awake. They involve the five senses and are more significant and unforgettable. Visions expand our awareness. They are more real and crystal clear. There is no “Did this just happen?” Because something or someone has made a direct connection with you. You are being introduced to a new order, ancient wisdom, or understanding.”

were on King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a large statue from Daniel 2. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar the details of his dream and told him what his dream meant. Catherine explained how Swedenborg unlocked the meaning of the dream to us and she revealed the dream to the teens. The materials that the statue was made of, gold, silver,



*A panorama of teens in a session led by Rev. Catherine Lauber*

Renée went on to share her personal vision quest experience that she had when she was a young adult. The vision that she experienced nearly thirty years ago was profoundly illuminative and is still being revealed and expanded to her today.

Rev. Catherine Lauber directed the next two sessions. Catherine’s sessions

bronze, iron, and stone, correspond to the ages of the Church from the Most Ancient to the New Christian Church (modern Christianity). The statue also relates to the phases of human development from infancy to mature adult. Catherine and the teens learned how Nebuchadnezzar’s statue dream relates

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**The Editor's Desk**



**All Good Things . . .**

There are rumors afoot that I am planning to retire as editor of *the Messenger*. They are true—I started them!

In this later stage of my life, I have realized that I want to devote more time to other interests—reading, creative pursuits, traveling, and volunteer activities, for starters. I have not set a date for my retirement; it depends on several factors. After the annual convention, I will be working with President Jane Siebert and the Standing Committee for Communication and Information to establish a process for finding a new editor and beginning a search.

**Surviving Our Stress Culture**

Some Christians in the United States believe that separation of church and state is too rigid, and that we are a Christian nation that should tolerate discrimination against non-Christians in the name of religious freedom. In this view, the Christian values of compassion and charity are not the business of the government. This view argues that the federal government should allow states, localities, and individuals to enforce cultural values derived from religious doctrine as law; it should be lawful for them to discriminate against

non-Christians and those who do not live by or agree with the values prescribed by their religious beliefs, and that they should have sole authority in determining how those values are applied.

Many other Americans, myself included, believe that our nation was founded on ideals that include Christian principles of compassion and charity and that, as a nation, we are obligated to work for social justice and against discrimination, whatever the proposed justification.

This division in understanding of Christianity in action is but a piece of the fraught political atmosphere that stems from extreme disagreement on cultural and national security issues and an atmosphere of chaos in political leadership.

For some, this chaos is a clarion call for the ultimate expression of Christian exclusivity in America. To others, it is a frightening sign of a larger struggle to prevent nativism and authoritarianism in the guise of Christianity to

trample both the Christian call to respect and accept one another with love and the American ideals of providing refuge for the oppressed and living in equality and freedom.

We must decide, as individuals and as a nation, whether to express our Christianity by seeking religion-controlled government or by following its principles to secure a government that reflects our compassion and caring.

The next issue will be the September *Messenger*, and it will feature annual convention highlights.

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **June 29–July 3:** 2019 Annual Swedenborgian Convention, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN
- **July 13–21:** Almont Church Camp, Allerton, MI
- **July 21–27:** Paulhaven Summer Camp, Upper Mann Lake, Alberta, Canada
- **July 28–August 3:** International Summer Camp for Teens, Purley Chase, England
- **August 3–18:** FNCA Family Summer Camp, Fryeburg, ME
- **August 28–31, 2020:** Gathering Leaves, Purley Chase, England

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## Letter from the President



*The Year of the Lord: 2018–19*  
—*The Primacy of Spirit*

Dear Friends of the Swedenborgian Church,

### **How do disposable plastic water bottles and Swedenborgians intersect?**

**Announcement:** There will be *no* plastic bottles of water for 2019 convention-goers. Our theme this year is “Rooted in Spirit: Earth is Speaking to Us.” The Planning Committee agreed we must live what we are talking about. Barb Halle found reusable water bottles for everyone at a surplus store. There will be gallons and gallons of cold water to fill water bottles.

It is one small thing we can do. But it speaks more than just not drinking water out of throw-away plastic bottles. It is a conscious decision, one of many that we need to make to live our religion and follow the basic tenet of our theology: “All of RELIGION relates to LIFE and the LIFE of RELIGION is to do GOOD.”

We need to be known as a current-day church, living what we believe, the sacred interconnectedness of all things: refugees, elephants, butterflies, ice caps, guns, and even plastic water bottles.

Everything natural relates to something spiritual. And, “. . . things that happen in the natural world offer us a reflection of things in the spiritual world (*Heaven and Hell* §56).” What happens

in the spiritual world when we throw away a plastic water bottle that stays around in our natural world for 450 years? It is vital to recycle, but we have been shown that even our efforts of recycling cannot take care of all the problems. Why choose to drink from a plastic water bottle at all?

What pollutes our world pollutes our spirit. Not caring enough about what God has created to preserve and honor it reveals our lack of love and worship of God.

It is easy to sit back and think science will fix our problems. We’ve heard of super huge air filters that will take the destructive carbon out of our air (that we’ve put there) and put it back in the soil. I’ve seen pictures of enormous tubes that can collect the plastic and other junk in our oceans (that we’ve discarded). But science cannot completely undo what we have done because we continue to pollute, to overuse, to over-medicate.

Something has to work with science, to wake up the need for changes in our lifestyles. We have to care about our natural world, because it affects us all. We need to get “woke.”

Swedenborg was a scientist before he became a spiritual explorer and theologian. He didn’t put away his scientific mind when he explored heaven and earth. They actually became more connected for him, as he noted, “Now it is permitted to enter the mysteries of faith with our intelligence.”

Swedenborgians are known for bringing science and religion back together. This needs to happen in our world today. We do not set the facts of science aside. The facts that science produces help us to understand what we are up against. It is in remembering that the Lord God from the beginning instructed us to work and take care of the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, all the living creatures and all the variety of vegetation of the land. “Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I the Lord dwell among you (Numbers 35:34).”

—*Rev. Jane Siebert, President*

## Teens Explore Dreams

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to our personal regeneration journey from the innocence of childhood to the innocence of wisdom.

I led the last session. My session was on Ezekiel's vision of the four creatures and their associated wheels found in Ezekiel 1. We read and meditated on the incredible vision, then we had some fun creating one of the creatures with four teens, masks, and hula hoops! I explained how the story presents both an image of God and an image of the characteristics we need (from God) when we are struggling. "This is a story of how we can trust in divine providence to guide us to a better place when we are held in captivity or feel imprisoned." We discussed the different ways we can be held captive or imprisoned.

"Other people can hold us captive to ideas and thoughts that are false or that we don't agree with. We can be bullied or forced to do something we don't want to do. We can also hold ourselves captive, which is often even worse. Divine providence can help us when we are held captive and Ezekiel's dream helps us understand how."

I then went through the dream and explained its inner meaning. I focused largely on the dream aspects of the wings, the eye-covered wheels, and the faces of the creatures (human, lion, ox, and eagle). Each of the faces represents a characteristic that we need when we are held captive, and these are the qualities we look for from God at these times. The human is intelligence; the



*The teens consider the wisdom of Rev. Renée Machiniak*

lion is powerful truth, strong love, and bravery; the ox is useful, solid, good works; and the eagle is reason and spiritual sight to guide us forward. The vision concludes with a rainbow, which represents a covenant between God and us. This is a promise from God to continue to guide us and direct us through our struggle with providence, love, and care.

including a guitar, a violin, a ukulele, and, I think, maybe even a flute. We enjoyed beautiful weather for our Sunday afternoon mini-golf and go-kart outing and frolicked around camp late Sunday night, hunting for hidden glowing bananas.



*Wyatt, Jack, Lauren, Nathan, Gil, Allayna, Ivy, and Molly enjoy hanging out on the lawn*

The teens also had great fun during their free time. They splashed through the grass in a rainstorm, threw lots of Frisbee and played tennis in the sun, flew a drone, and hung out on the lawn playing and listening to music. They brought so many different instruments,



*Scout and Bella listen to the sweet strumming of flower child Oliver.*

I led the retreat closing worship service on Sunday evening. We sang songs about dreams (What's your favorite dream song?) and passed out little scrolls of truth with chocolate candy rocks. For our scripture reading, Josh played Jacob and reacted the famous dream scene of Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:10–22) while I read the passage

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## Teens Explore Dreams

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and Jack softly strummed guitar in the background.<sup>1</sup>

He reached a certain place and stopped for the night. The sun had already set. He took one of the stones there and placed it under his



*Allayna (lion), Kristofer (eagle), Nathan (ox), and Jack (human) construct the creature from Ezekiel 1.*



*Bella, Julia, Boston, Adrianna, and Scout ready to play*



*Gil, Jack, Wyatt, Nathan, and "clubber" Josh.*

head. Then he lay down to sleep. In a dream he saw a stairway standing on the earth. Its top reached to heaven. The angels of God were going up and coming down on it. The Lord stood beside the stairway (Genesis 28:11–12).

As we gathered together in our worship community and considered

<sup>1</sup> Pro tip: Make sure you anoint your pillow-sized stone in the place where you want it to stay. It's difficult to move a large, oily, rock.

Jacob's ladder, it was powerfully easy to visualize the angelic connect between heaven and earth. The flow of loving thoughts rising up from our circle to heaven and returning to us as purified angelic truth was alive and tangible. You could almost see and feel the exchange of positive of energy as we quietly sat in our candle-lit circle of friends. We all need a solid stone of truth for the base of our ladder. The Bible, a prayer book, meaningful positive music, inspirational readings, whatever gets us outside ourselves and into a higher spiritual state.



*Teen retreat staffers, Heather Guzik, Kurt Fekete, Rachael Sbrocco, and Heather Oelker.*

Renée Machiniak, and Rev. Catherine Lauber. And thank you Lori Patina and all the caretakers and keepers of the Almont Retreat Center. In the words of Jacob,

SCYL teen retreats certainly make a wonderful stone pillow! It makes me feel incredibly joyful to know that the teens have retreats, camps, and this Church as places that they can go to gain awareness of the ebb and flow of truth and goodness to and from our divine Creator.

Thank you to our wonderful retreat staff: Heather Guzik, Heather Oelker, Rachael Sbrocco, Rev.

The Lord is surely in this place. How holy this place is! This must be the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. May God be with me. May he watch over me on this journey I'm taking. May he give me food to eat and clothes to wear. Then you, Lord, will be my God. ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church. He works with teens and pre-teens throughout the year at retreats, camps, and the annual convention.

# A Short History of the Swedenborgian Church of North America: Part 2

BY JIM LAWRENCE

*Rev. Lawrence, dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, wrote this piece for "World Religions and Spirituality" (WRSP) (<https://tinyurl.com/SwbrgChrchHstry>). Established in 2010 at Virginia Commonwealth University, the mission of WRSP is to provide objective, reliable, and comprehensive information about the world's diverse array of religious and spiritual groups.*

*This is the second part of a two-part article. Part 1 appeared in the May 2019 Messenger. Part 1 provided a timeline for the Church and sections on the history of Emanuel Swedenborg and Swedenborgian groups, and doctrines and beliefs.*

## Rituals/Practices

The spiritual practice that has dominated the history of this group has centered on liturgical worship. Music, prayers, and liturgical responses support the central event: an interpretive sermon rationally interpreting how to live through an explication of various inner levels of meaning in scripture. Swedenborgians may be the only tradition that begins every service with a ritual opening of the Bible on the altar and ends after the benediction with ritual closing of the Bible (Lawrence 2005:605–08). Recently, the majority of churches have become increasingly “low church” and contemporary in worship style. Outside of worship, study and discussion groups on Swedenborg’s works and Swedenborgian secondary literature have been the primary form of practice, though in the past few decades there has been a conspicuous increase incorporating numerous other thinkers, teachers, and traditions.

While Swedenborg holds the status of prophet among most Swedenborgians worldwide, in this most liberal branch he is regarded more

as “the best among many” worthy spiritual resources. American psychologist Wilson Van Dusen, in the latter decades of the twentieth century, developed a widely popular approach to Swedenborgian spiritual practice that is informed by Swedenborg’s own spiritual practice, and he moved significant numbers toward meditation, dream work, and reliance upon direct personal experience with the divine (Van Dusen 1974, 1975, and 1992).

## Organization/Leadership

The denomination is democratically governed by the rank-and-file membership through a representative government headed by a General Council. Comprising ten members as of 2018, four of whom are officers, all General Council members are elected in a term-limit system at the annual summer convention.

Voting delegates are determined by regional associations, which are allotted delegates in a proportional formula based on the membership totals in the associations. The associations comprise constituent societies of 501(c)(3) organizations within that geographic region.

There are also five standing committees, each composed of three to five people who are also elected by delegates. These are working groups that function throughout the year handling responsibilities for financial functions, publishing (online and print), educational events and support resources, information management,

and nominations for the upcoming convention.

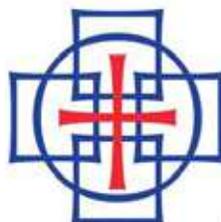
The other important body is the Council of Ministers, which has powers over the standards and process for ministry training and which provides counsel and guidance for the spiritual work of the denomination. Ordained clergy have automatic voting rights at the summer convention and are kept on a separate roll from the laity delegates from the Associations.

## Issues/Challenges

Swedenborgianism in many peoples’ minds was associated with the spiritualist movement that fascinated the public starting in the 1830s with the Fox sisters. Though most Swedenborgian thought leaders eschewed spiritualist practices, the conflation was impossible to avoid due to Swedenborg’s own declarations about himself. Beginning with his first published volume of theosophy, his magnum opus, *Arcana Coelestia* (*Secrets of Heaven*), Swedenborg made claims of direct access to the spiritual realms, as well as to the mind of God, and thus was able to convey information from the spiritual world (Swedenborg 1749–1756/1983). Though the eight volumes were published anonymously from 1749–1756, Swedenborg’s identity as the author became known after he became something of a psychic sensation due to three particular highly public episodes in 1760 and 1761 involving some well-known witnesses (Sigstedt 1952:269–86).

Overnight he became something of a controversy, with significant friends in important places, such as Sweden’s Prime Minister Anders von Hopkins,

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Swedenborg Church of North America logo

## A Short History

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but many detractors who considered him a charlatan. Cartoons making fun of him became common, as well as testimonies from reputable people who knew him. Immanuel Kant went to considerable lengths to investigate the stories of Swedenborg's alleged clair-audience and clairvoyance, sending a trusted envoy to Sweden so as to better reckon whether such theoretical channels of knowing could be considered in his philosophy of epistemology (Sigstedt 1952:303–04).

Swedenborg's spiritualist narratives are presented to the reader as actual experiences Swedenborg had in the spiritual world, and this published material is why he acquired the moniker "seer." He claimed to friends and later to inquirers as well as in his books that by permission and ability from the Lord he was able to explore the spiritual world while still in the earthly world. This was allowed in order to see more deeply into the nature of life and to answer questions of doubts that were driving people to unbelief and the established churches into grievous errors (Tafel 1875–1877: I, 92, 207). As his posthumously discovered and published private journal (Swedenborg 1883) reveals, he wrote copiously of these experiences immediately after the time he claims to have been intromitted to the spiritual world, in 1745, and continued to do so for twenty more years up to *Apocalypse Revealed*, when he began publishing accounts more transparently. Such radical and seemingly preposterous claims coupled with a biography of extraordinary accomplishments and significant influence in modern Western history, has led to a long history of discussion regarding Swedenborg's psychological disposition.

In *Secrets of Heaven*, Swedenborg had begun the practice of what has been conventionally referred to as his

"memorabilia" or "memorable relations." These are theological essays concluding each chapter of exegesis of Genesis and Exodus (about ninety in all), whose topical approaches are informed, as the seer consistently makes clear, by his experiences in the spiritual world. Because these topical essays do not usually relate closely to the inner sense meanings of the chapter to which they are appended, the memorabilia have commonly been regarded as "inter-chapter material" to distinguish them from the biblical commentary *per se*. Didactic and instructional, the memorabilia of *Secrets of Heaven* form the basis of his five 1758 works, which are described as derivative works for this reason (Swedenborg 1848).

**Cartoons making fun of him became common, as well as testimonies from reputable people who knew him.**

After these public sensations, Swedenborg published his fifth major work, *Apocalypse Revealed*, which contains, appended to every chapter of interpretation of the Apocalypse, sections of spiritualist information on the afterlife and the nature of the spiritual world (Swedenborg 1766/1855). Throughout his publications he often used the phrase "things seen and heard" (*ex auditis et visis*) about his spiritual world experiences. Somewhat like a coda, nearly always they are placed at the end of the chapter's commentary and usually have their own point to make not closely related to the subject proper of his Apocalypse exegesis.

His spiritual world experiences thus became more explicit and pedagogical, with teaching points to be drawn from them. With that pivot, Swedenborg more dramatically entered a style of writing that became the first text in the modern genre of spiritualist literature. History of religion scholars have often argued he is the first spiritualist author (Schmidt 2000:200–46;

Block 1932: 56–57; Goodrick-Clarke 2008:152–78; Doyle 1926:1:1–18). Aldous Huxley gauges Swedenborg as dramatically distinctive for his unusual access to spiritual phenomena (Huxley 1956: 13–14), and historian of nineteenth-century America Bret Carroll details the origin of spiritualism in claims of direct and retrievable discourse with personalities now living in the spiritual world as a tradition that began with Swedenborg and "a veritable Swedenborgian subculture in Transcendentalist America" (Carroll 1997:16–34).

Organizational strife characterized much of the first century. This oldest American branch endured a large-scale schism at the end of the nineteenth-century in a classic liberal-conservative split characteristic of many American Christian movements at the time. The long rising liberal tendencies in religion across the United States (and Europe) spurred many efforts to conserve and retrieve original traditions, often in the form of purist or fundamentalist rhetoric. In American Swedenborgianism, what became known as the Academy Movement originated mid-century and culminated with a formal schism in 1890 (Williams-Hogan and Eller 2005:183–92). The core principle involved the infallibility of Swedenborg (Block 1952:205–32). A prominent contentious issue, emblematic of the difference between the two branches, involved whether Swedenborg's writings are themselves scripture. The older branch does not speak of Swedenborg's writings as scripture, whereas the younger branch, the General Church, calls them the Third Testament. As such, the General Church reads from them in services as part of the Word along with Old and New Testament readings. In addition, whereas the older branch is congregational in polity, meaning that local congregations control the operations

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of the ministry, including doctrinal interpretations, the new branch adopted episcopal polity with operational and doctrinal authority stemming from the Executive Bishop.

Centered in Pennsylvania, what became the General Church of the New Jerusalem ultimately built the largest non-African Swedenborgian branch in the world. The headquarters in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, evolved to include one of the most studied and remarkable cathedrals in America (the second largest church building in Pennsylvania and the cathedral built most authentically using medieval techniques and craftsmanship found in America) and also a four-year liberal arts college. The two branches have continued to represent a classic liberal-conservative schism to the present time with the older liberal branch ordaining women since 1975 and openly gay ordinands since 1997, whereas the younger conservative branch has consistently resisted efforts to ordain women and has never allowed the question of gay ordination to be discussed in any open forum. Despite the gap in interpretation styles on Swedenborg, there are ways in which the two branches cooperate, especially in publishing ventures and occasionally at local levels when churches of each branch are in close proximity.



The Cathedral in  
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

The conservative branch endured its own schism in the 1930s as a group taking the name “The Lord’s New Church Which Is *Nova Hierosolyma*” (usually called The Lord’s New Church or *Nova*) broke away over its claims that because Swedenborg’s writings are the Third Testament and therefore

sacred scripture, they, too, must contain an inner sense. This group, though small in the United States, has an international profile, with churches, most prominently, in Holland and Ukraine (Williams-Hogan and Eller 2005:292–94). ☩

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\*Swedenborg wrote all his works in Latin.

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# Organizing for an Interfaith Future

## The Graduate Theological Union's multiple centers of learning give it the resources to face an interfaith future

BY KAREN STILLER

*The Center for Swedenborgian Studies, our seminary and academic research and teaching entity, is housed at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California. The following article illuminates the structure and mission of that institution.—Ed.*

The phone rang just as Susan Hoganson, chair of the board of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California, was dashing out the door to a Palm Sunday service. It was one of her dearest friends, a Jewish woman with whom Hoganson has traveled the world. During their brief conversation, Hoganson realized her highly educated friend, who was immersed in literature and art, had no idea what Palm Sunday was. "I said, 'I'll have to explain it to you,'" she remembers. And that became another chapter in ongoing interfaith conversations Hoganson regularly has. "It's more than learning about other religions," she says. "It's having the opportunity to talk with someone who practices a different faith and really understand what is

important to them. And in some way it strengthens your own faith by understanding them." That is the kind of dialogue that is at the heart of the Graduate Theological Union, a consortium of eight theological schools and more than a dozen research centers representing a variety of traditions, including Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and Swedenborgian, among others. The consortium and most of its individual schools occupy Holy Hill, a neighborhood just north of the University of California's flagship campus in Berkeley.

### A Complex Governance Structure

The GTU Board of Directors is the governance body that oversees the consortium. The board itself reflects GTU's diversity: It's made up of the president of each member school, plus GTU president Riess Potterveld. Each of the eight member schools also elects one representative member, who serves alongside two members of the core doctoral faculty (elected by their fellow faculty members), one doctoral

### GTU Member Schools

- American Baptist Seminary of the West (American Baptist Churches)
- Church Divinity School of the Pacific (Episcopal Church)
- Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (Roman Catholic)
- Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University (Roman Catholic)
- Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
- Pacific School of Religion (United Church of Christ with historic ties to United Methodist Church and Disciples of Christ)
- San Francisco Theological Seminary (Presbyterian Church [USA])
- Starr King School for the Ministry (Unitarian Universalist)

student, and one master's student. Up to twenty-four at-large board members round out the governing body.

But the overall governance is even more complex, because each member school has its own board of trustees, as do the affiliate organizations. The research centers have advisory councils. The Council of Presidents guides the GTU's daily operations, meeting monthly. (Only the presidents of the member schools sit on the council, although the heads of the affiliates update the council on their activities and plans.)

Hal Leach, past chair of the board, believes that if GTU is going to thrive in an interreligious world, the whole board must embrace its vision and learn to see themselves as part of a pioneering effort.

It is the role of the board to initiate conversations about growth, risk, and new offerings, he says. "If you're not moving forward, than you're

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### A Short History

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regressing. Boards need to continually push that.”

Hoganson, who succeeded Leach as chair, agrees. She calls GTU “a powerhouse jewel that is sitting on the hills.” She says that one of the board’s frustrations is that “we have this little treasure, and we want more people in the community to know it’s there, to participate, to give money, to be aware.”

Hoganson says the largest challenge is making sure that the members of the board represent the diversity of the faiths that GTU serves. “We’ve been minimally successful at it,” she says. “I’d like to see us become even more successful. It’s something we are working at.”

Hoganson also says that the board is looking for potential members who are enthusiastic about an interfaith board. “We are looking for the person who is excited by that, not the person who says ‘Oh gosh, I’m a life-long whatever and I’m only interested in that’; that might be a good person for an individual school’s board, but not necessarily the GTU board.”

Strategic planning happens at multiple levels at the sprawling consortium. Each school and center does its own planning for its own governance, programs, and facilities, but joint offerings are planned and implemented at the consortium level. And that includes interfaith activities that are central to the GTU’s DNA.

These are exciting and perilous times, and GTU has plans not just to survive but to flourish. That means marshalling all the consortium’s assets to reach out to the Bay Area and the state in all their diversity.

### Reaching a Growing Edge

Berkeley lies in Alameda County (population: 1.6 million), just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco.

The county’s ten largest faith groups, in order, are Catholics, nondenominational Christians, Muslims, Mormons, Southern Baptists, members of the Assemblies of God, Mahayana Buddhists, Presbyterians, and Reform Jews. Countless smaller groups are represented as well. That’s GTU’s context.

“Hopefully there is sufficient interest in interreligious studies that we will regain our ability to attract students and to reach a stronger model going forward,” says Potterveld. From the beginning, GTU’s founders described it as interfaith, but in the consortium’s early years, that meant various kinds of Christians studying together. Moving beyond “interdenominational” to embrace multiple religions has been “a long time coming,” he says.

The administration is optimistic that enrollment will pick up as students are drawn by a vast banquet of courses—about 700 per year—that represent a multitude of faith traditions. And they hope that the opportunity to study alongside students of other faiths and learn from professors who actually practice those faiths (most faculty are fixed in a tradition) will be a growing edge that sets GTU ahead of the competition.

How are they recruiting those students? Each member school operates its own admissions office and recruits its own master’s-level seminarists; Potterveld says that the various admissions offices generally don’t compete for the same students. Furthermore, any student can take a course at any member institution, and cross-registration helps break down silos. If competition for students does exist, it is friendly, and all students are poured into the wide-open world of the GTU.

### Interfaith Collaboration

The consortium is trying to offer a healing example for troubled times. “We are living in a world where many religions are in conflict with each

## GTU Academic Centers

- The Center for the Arts, Religion, and Education promotes scholarship, reflection, and practice in the arts and religion.
- The Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies supports scholars and students studying Hindu and Jain philosophy and religion.
- The Center for Islamic Studies provides graduate courses in Islamic history, theology, philosophy, culture, arts, and religious practice.
- The Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies offers programs for Jewish students planning careers in Jewish studies or Jewish education and provides for exchanges between Jewish and non-Jewish scholars.
- The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, incorporated as a nonprofit in 1982, promotes dialogue between religion and science.

## GTU Affiliates

- The Center for Swedenborgian Studies was an independent seminary from 1866 until 2001, when it became a house of studies at Pacific School of Religion. In 2015, it affiliated with GTU, where it offers courses in theology, the arts, spirituality, history, and biblical studies. The center is the official seminary of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.
- The Institute of Buddhist Studies, an affiliate of GTU since 1985, is associated with the Buddhist Churches of America and offers a master’s degree in Buddhist studies jointly with GTU.
- New College Berkeley, an evangelical institution affiliated with GTU since 1992, offers a year-round program of continuing education and seminars in topics like “faith and daily life,” “faith and science,” and “faith and geopolitics.”
- The Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, a “patriarchal institute” under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, offers lectures and other educational programs and co-sponsors (with GTU) a master’s in Orthodox Christian studies.

## GTU Certificate-Only Programs

- The Asia Project offers courses on Asian religions, cultures, and theologies.
- Women’s Studies in Religion Program offers programs and a certificate in women’s studies in religion for graduate students at GTU and its member schools.
- The Black Church/Africana Religious Studies Program offers a certificate program for students enrolled at GTU or its member schools.

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## Passages

### Deaths

**James Henry “Jim” Friesen** passed fully into the spiritual world May 23, 2019. Jim was a lifelong member of the Rosthern (Saskatchewan) New Church, where he played the organ, faithfully performed the duties of secretary and treasurer, and took offerings. Jim’s funeral was held in the Mennonite Church in Rosthern, formerly the Swedenborgian Church.

**Rev. Chungsun Moses Lee** transitioned into the spiritual world on March 11, 2019, at the age 93.

Rev. Lee graduated from Cho Sun Theological Seminary in 1950. He came to the U.S. and studied at the

New Church Theological School, finishing his master’s degree at Harvard University. He was appointed general pastor of Asian-identified congregants for the Swedenborgian Church and served the New Church of Los Angeles as a pastor from 1971 to 1979. From 1981 to 1984 he was a dean at Kang Nam Theology and Social Service University, in Korea. From 1985 until his retirement in 1995, he served as pastor of the Church of Little Grain in Brooklyn. This church is now known as the Korean New Church and continues to serve the New York City Korean community.

Rev. Lee was predeceased by his beloved wife, Po Young. He is survived by two sons and two daughters and dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ☪

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other,” says Potterveld, but at GTU, there’s a unique opportunity to examine what he calls persistent perplexing problems—and perhaps even to work on solutions. “What we’re slowly doing is developing the capacity to get all the religions to focus on some of these issues that are tearing cultures apart, the things that need to be resolved for us to have a more peaceful world.”

GTU’s seventh annual Islamophobia Conference was held in 2015. The conference, one of many regular events hosted by GTU’s Center for Islamic Studies, is an example of that center’s dual commitment to scholarship and service to the wider community.

The Center for Islamic Studies was established in 2007, and Munir Jiwa has been its director since the beginning; he also teaches Islamic Studies. He says that the center “brings together academic study in an interreligious context where the practice of faith matters.” He adds: “A lot of what we do

is outreach to other academic communities, but we also want non-academic communities to participate, whether its art communities or interfaith communities. They are all important for us to enlarge the conversation and see Islam as an American religion, which it is.”

The collaboration between GTU’s Center for Islamic Studies and the Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies is the poster child for how interfaith collaboration can play out on GTU’s campus and beyond.

In 2009, the two centers joined forces to offer the Madrasa-Midrasha program, which produces workshops, lectures, courses, and public events exploring “what is similar and what is different,” says Jiwa.

“As the two non-Christian centers at the time, we decided there was so much misunderstanding of both traditions and of each other’s traditions, and there wasn’t a lot of time and space to study them both together and learn something about Jews and Muslims,” he adds.

The first public class held jointly by the two centers was filled to capacity, and they haven’t looked back. Since then, class topics have included “Media Representations of Jews and Muslims,” “Hagar in the Jewish and Islamic Traditions,” “Kosher and Halal,” and “Thinking about Gaza,” all examined by Jewish and Muslim scholars who study and practice their faiths together.

### Doctoral Programs Play to GTU’s Strengths

Students entering the Ph.D. program at the GTU can choose their fields of study from among more than thirty concentrations, which are grouped into four interdisciplinary departments:

- Sacred texts and their interpretation
- Historical and cultural studies of religion
- Theology and ethics
- Religion and practice

Within these departments are more than thirty concentrations, such as rabbinic literature, Buddhist studies, Hindu theology, Islamic philosophy and theology, and homiletics.

The program is designed to encourage more cross-disciplinary and interreligious study and dialogue. The curriculum builds on the ecumenical, interreligious, and interdisciplinary strengths of the GTU, and offers enhanced opportunities for both specialization and cross-disciplinary study. The GTU’s doctoral program utilizes the depth of faculty expertise made possible by its eight member schools and more than a dozen academic centers and affiliates.

### Funding a Sprawling Consortium

All of the schools in the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) run annual fund campaigns, draw from their own endowments, and (of course) generate tuition and fees from students.

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### About the Swedenborgian Church

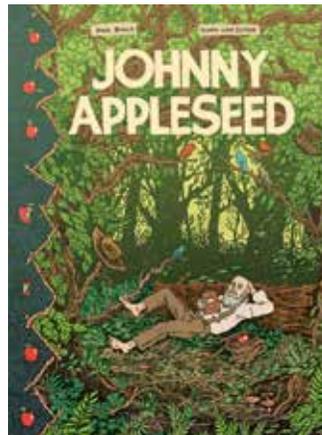
Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death. American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questioning and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

## The Real Johnny Appleseed

A new comic book biography of Johnny Appleseed, by Paul Buhle (author) and Noah Van Sciver (illustrator), does justice to the real life of John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) by focussing on his missionary work in service to Emanuel Swedenborg's writings and his purpose



in life of spreading peace and love.

Paul Buhle, a retired senior lecturer in American Studies at Brown University, brings academic credibility to this history, and Noah Van Sciver brings it to life through detailed drawings in this most accessible of book forms.

You can read a review and view some excerpts at <https://tinyurl.com/yyb39mnk>. It is available at <http://www.fantagraphics.com/johnny-appleseed/>. 📖

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Auxiliary income is generated by activities like rental property and continuing education programs.

But what about the consortium itself? GTU President Riess Potterveld explains: "Member schools are obligated to pay into the library, through a prescribed formula based on student credit hours, and a general allocation that helps underwrite the expense of running the GTU." The GTU also pays into the library and is in fact the largest contributor, because GTU has the largest student

enrollment. Moreover, GTU has its own annual fundraising and its own endowment of more than \$40 million.

Individual member schools may also contract with the central GTU administration for services like accounting, financial aid, and informational technology. Fees for these services are arranged between the GTU business office and the school. 📖

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